

# THE RETURN OF STEPTOE

Entry No. 80 in Our Prize Story Competition

BY ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

THE two-story, weather-boarded home of old Powhatan Pentecost differed as radically from the common log cabin on Big Rainy as the black bearded men and sleeved women of the Pentecost clan differed from the average lack luster mountaineer who wrung a lean living from his hillside acre. For the Pentecosts were "cove" people, and from these fat little pockets of the range they had drawn a superior bone and sinew. Yet they were as distinctly "mountain" as the surviving panthers in the fastnesses of Leifert Gorge.

One summer afternoon Powhatan sat on his veranda, surrounded by his multitudinous kith and kin,—two brothers, a sister, eleven children (all married), grandchildren, and great grandchildren. The single absent member of the clan was Powhatan's youngest son, Steptoe, a sprig of twenty-two who had fled the mountain by night two years before. But today his name was in everybody's mouth; for he had taken unto himself a wife, a "lowland" wife,—in the vernacular, a "furner,"—and at this moment was bridal touring toward his parental home. Hence the gathering of the clan.

He was expected in time for dinner; but the thirty-mile drive from Holly Tree Station, over the treacherous roads and unbridged streams of the mountain, made the hour of his arrival uncertain. In fact, a number of those present believed, and frankly predicted, that he would not appear at all. In the first place, the indictment against him for shooting a horse under Fabian Shimp still hung over his head. Secondly, there was his broken engagement with Spicy Birdsong, and some were of the opinion that Steptoe lacked the nerve to brave a possible encounter with Spicy's father.

"Though I don't believe Emmett would tech him," declared Owain Pentecost, stropping his jackknife across his boot. "My opinion, Emmett's glad to have escaped such a son in law. Ner do I believe Spicy Birdsong ever left this hyer mounting and went off to school down below 'count of grief over a tow headed cub like Step."

TOW headed" was no chance epithet of Owain's; for the very first of Steptoe's long series of reprehensible acts was unquestionably his being born into the black maned, swart skinned Pentecost tribe with hair as fair and eyes as blue as a Christmas doll's. Horns and hoofs could scarcely have added to the amazement of his kin, or better prepared them for what followed; for, from his first hour almost, Steptoe's course ran counter to the traditions and constitution of his family. He never cried; he walked at eight months, talked at ten, and ran off at twelve. As a youth he shirked work and played hooky from school.

Yet he always had money, and at fifteen had read every book within a radius of ten miles. He could talk in public with an ease that staggered his tongue-tied kin; and at sixteen, having got hold of a Bob Ingersoll book, he scandalized every Methodist on Patmos circuit by challenging Parson Highshew to a debate. Barter was the breath of his nostrils. Old steel traps, old guns, any old thing that no one else wanted, turned to gold in his hands. He could wheedle, cajole, or trade his elder brothers out of anything he desired, and on his seventeenth birthday he owned three horses and five head of cattle.

As a result, though everybody liked him, the mountain, including a goodly number of Pentecosts themselves, pronounced him a bad "aig." His aged parents, however, loved him perhaps above all their other children; and after he had been gone some eight months Powhatan electrified the neighborhood by announcing his intention of journeying down into that foreign country vaguely described as "Below," to see how it fared with his son, who meanwhile had learned telegraphy and become the agent of a wayside station on the T. & O.

THIS adventure of Powhatan's had furnished entertainment for many a winter night round the crackling fireplace when the storm giants stalked the mountain with thunderous tread and blasting breath of frost. In fact, the tales were still in requisition; and when one of Powhatan's granddaughters appeared with his linen collar, an irksome piece of finery that he hated like a boy, he said:

"Babby, leave that collar off a spell longer, and I'll tell ye how Steppy flagged the train."



"Come, Friends, and Meet My Wife!" Called Out Steptoe Gaily.

Babette, nothing loath, squatted on a footstool. Conversation slackened, and there was a general hitching up of chairs. The old chieftain drew half a dozen slow, preliminary puffs from his pipe, and deliberately began:

"Me and Steppy war sittin' in his little office; ticket winder hyar, ticket winder thar, telegraph a clickin' like a crazy clock. Presen'ly we hears a sound like the squall of a painter. 'No. 12,' says Steppy, and pulls a rope. 'That's to let her-go by,' says he, and we steps out to see her pass. Some on you hev seen the narry gage, down to Holly Tree, I reckon. 'Tain't only a toy. Looks as much like a real train as a sugar bird looks like an eagle. This train 'peared to be—mind you, I don't say she war, but she 'peared to be—as wide across the front as a pair o' barn doors and suthin' like a quarter of a mile long. Down that slope she come like the mill-tail o' hades, a quiverin' with heat and a sluicin' from side to side. Next thing my hat flies off and a streak of yaller clutters by. Then, before you could rub the dust out'n your eyes, she was half a mile away, like a rabbit scootin' fer the bush.

"Them people c't breakfast in Richmond," says Step, 'and they'll eat supper in Cincinnati,' says he. 'No supper fer them!' says I. 'They'll never stop that train this side the Spacific Ocean,' says I. He laughed. 'Why, I could stop her myself,' says he, 'just by leavin' that semmyphone up, p'intin' across the track to a tall post with a red board hangin' slantwise from the top.

"I jedged the boy was lyin'; but said nothin' more. The next day in walks a perky feller that Step called a drummer—though fer why I couldn't say, fer he kerried no drum. I paid no pertic'lar 'tention till I hears this drummer say sunthin' about stoppin' No. 12. Then I pricks up my ears like a shote at swiftness.

"'What's it wuth to you?' asks Steppy fin'ly, in that old barterin' tone of his'n.

"Two bucks," says the man, meanin' dollars.

"Fork it over," says Step, and, turmin' to me he whispers, 'By gad, Pappy! you'll see me stop No. 12 now.'

"He looked kinder pale; but I knowed he was goin' to let that board stay up. Presen'ly we hear that painter squall ag'in, and thar she come, by quince! like a boulder down the side o' Leifert Gorge. Then, seain the board didn't come down as usual, she screeched ag'in and ag'in, like some turrible animule under a dead-fall. Steppy war pale fer sartain then. But that board stayed up, fire begin to fly from her wheels, and the engine comes to a stop a little beyant us, pantin' like a man harf dead fer breath. A door flies open and the drummer jumps up. Same time a big feller in blue clothes and brass buttons jumps down.

"'What in tarnation do you-mean,' says he to Step, 'to stop No. 12,' says he, 'in this hyer gap o' the woods?' says he.

"'That drummer's pappy air a dyin',' says Step, without a blink, 'and he's got to git to Yorkville tonight.'

"That big feller turned red, then white, then red. Then he laughed like a feller who had to do somethin' or bust. 'Kid,' says he, not knowin' the boy had lied, 'your heart's all right; but your head would skin a holler gum fer hivin' a swarm of bees.' Then he waves his hand, the engine snarls and snorts, and presen'ly all you could see was a wisp of smoke. And to think," he concluded proudly, "the little tike war gittin' fawty dollars a month!"

IT was indeed something to think of, there in the mountain, where fifty cents was considered a fair day's wage; and more than one stooped, leather skinned listener was conscious of a reprehensible but wholly human resentment of Steptoe's prosperity.

"I allow Step has shelled out a plenty of his money on this slip o' calico he's tied up to," observed Squirrel Deadmound acridly.

"There's nothin' like havin' it to shell, Squoll," retorted Babette.

Powhatan's consort, expelled from the kitchen by her daughters and granddaughters, now appeared. With her little, brown, work worn hands, she smoothed her flat, parted hair, as black yet as a crow's wing. In spite of the festive occasion, her face was grave, almost sad. Doubtless she was thinking less of the few brief hours with her son than of the days and years to come without him, for his marriage with a "furner" had killed her last hope that some day he might again take up life on his native mountain.

"Pappy," said she, "did Emmett or Calliope 'low, when you war down thar yistiddy, when they looked fer Spicy back?"

"Nary a word."

"Seems strange they should keep so shet about her. The 'cademy let out a week ago, she told Aunt Sue Larabee. You don't reckon she'd hire out down thar fer the summer, do you?"

"Couldn't say. With Stepcomin' home today with another gal, I wa'n't up to axin' 'em anything about Spicy."

Granny indulged in a momentary brown study. "Seems queer to me," she observed finally, "that if Spicy's only twenty mile from Steptoe they shouldn't see ner hear nothing of each other."

"Mammy, I reckon Spicy ain't been lavin' her year to the ground to ketch any rumblin's from Steptoe," spoke up Axom, her eldest son. He was a giant in stature, bearded like a pirate, with fierce black eyes, and he was altogether opposed to this celebration of his younger brother's latest antic. He now rose and entered the house. Ato, another brother, was standing with spread legs and pocketed hands in front of the fireplace, now filled with blooming azaleas.

"Ten years ago Pap would have lit his pipe with these

hyer monkey pitchers, 'stid of settin' 'em on the mantel," complained Ato. "He's certainly failin'."

The "monkey pitchers" were three photos of Steptoe, taken soon after that young man had first sipped the heady wine of his new life. One showed him with a broad brimmed straw sailor hat on and a cigarette between his lips. Another, full length, was obviously designed to display a suit of clothes that might have been patterned after a horse blanket. The third—most fetching of all—exhibited him with a cane, a boutonniere, low shoes, and striped socks, one glance at which was enough to make Axom hot behind his whiskers.

A fourth picture occupied the other end of the mantel-piece. It represented the young woman who by this time was doubtless Mrs. Steptoe Pentecost. The two mountain men gazed unrelentingly at her picture hat and arch face, framed in a mass of fluffy hair. The hat was a creation such as no inhabitant of Big Rainy had ever imagined, and many a drab mountain woman, when unobserved, had gazed at this girl as a partridge might gaze at a peacock.

"Looks like she'd be real handy at makin' butter and sich!" observed Ato scathingly.

Axom's eyes smoldered. This slip of a girl had set the whole female side of the Pentecost tribe to diving into seldom opened chests for bombazines and silks of ancient cut, ribbons, and baubles for hair, neck, and wrist. And she had equally demoralized the men. They might dub her a "slip o' calico" and all that; but Axom had noticed that all their coats, however wrinkled and skimped in sleeve or tail, were black—and black was the mountain's chosen color for funeral or festival. Moreover, he felt sure that his brother Cowdry's suit had been bought for the occasion, though Cowdry stoutly swore that such was not the case.

At the other end of the room half a dozen young women encircled Axom's wife, ostensibly learning a new crochet stitch; but as he stood immersed in gloomy reflections he divined the real attraction from his wife's swiftly flowing words:

"Natchally, Girls, she's diff'rent from us. You got to remember that. Her way ain't our'n, nor our'n hers. Now, I don't reckon her and Step will tarry long. I reckon, after one good glimpse of us, she'll be ready to dig. But a lot kin happen in a short time when fire and powder git together. Nothin' must happen, though. Treat her like you would anyone else. Don't stare at her store clothes, or her hair, or any gimcracks she has on. Same time, don't act like a bound-boy at a huskin' bee. Be natchal, as I say. Don't show your ignorance—if you kin help it. If she speaks of somethin' you never heard of befo', and she likely will, just sort o' smile and no! your head and change the subject—though not too soon."

TO escape this depressing talk Axom took advantage of a commotion on the veranda to step to the door. The general neck twisting guided his eyes down the



Steptoe Read Every Book within Ten Miles.

road to a dusty buggy and white horse. He at once recognized Emmett Birdsong's snail paced old Petey, with his chee-box hoofs and shaggy fetlocks. Had there been any doubt, Calliope's black and orange bonnet would have removed it.

"Of course they're comin' here," said Granny Pentecost, sharply cutting off the chorus of speculations. "Where else would they be goin', this side of the Big Road?"

"Popsy, don't you dare ask 'em to stay fer dinner!" admonished Arthura Arrowsmith. "It would be terrible embarrassin' for everybody."

But all eyes, including Powhatan's, were fixed on Granny, awaiting her pronouncement. She had risen, and stood tall, straight, and commanding, curiously displaying in her attitude her tincture of Indian blood.

"I'm goin' to the kitchen to make sure there'll be dinner. If they stop, Pappy, you invite 'em to 'light and turn plates with us. There's wuss things 'n bein' embarrassed."

Amid a breathless hush old Petey, slowly but as surely as the sands of time, drew nearer, came abreast the wagon gate, churned his great hoofs purposelessly for a moment,—so it seemed to the watchers,—and then swung his Roman nose about like the prow of a boat.

Powhatan rose, hunched his long tailed coat, and calmly advanced to meet his visitors, a picturesque figure in his slouch hat and flowing hair. He extended his lean, sinewy hand first to one and then to the other of his old friends.

"Light, Folks, and tarry fer dinner. One o' the boys will bait your heast. Plenty of 'em sp'illin' today fer somethin' to do."

"So I see," answered Callie, her mild gray eyes peering through her steel rimmed spectacles. "But we just druv over to borry Angeline's apple butter-kittle. I don't know as we'd better stop, if you 'uns have a doin's."

"Tain't no proper doin's, Callie," answered Powhatan bravely; "otherwise, you and Emmett'd been invited. Truth is, Steptoe's expected home today, and he's—mebbe you've heard it—he's bringin' a wife along. Now, if you and Emmett keer to stay, Maw and me'd love to have you. But if you don't keer to stay, I reckon I know the reason why, and there'll be no offense."

"I s'pose we'd better stay, Mother," answered Emmett, after a pause. "Bygones air bygones, Pow, with me and Callie. Sides, we're too old to cherish feelin's ag'in' a boy."

As the trio approached, a general stir took place on the veranda, while a willowy girl dived into the front door and flew to the kitchen with the exciting news. Axom bestowed a sardonic grin on his brother.

"This'll damp Step a mite, eh?"

"If he's dampable," observed Ato doubtfully.

ANOTHER hour passed. The men, most of whom had breakfasted at daylight, were getting restless under the appetizing vapors that occasionally tickled their nostrils from the rear of the house. Then a thing happened that banished hunger. Poythress the Silent, who had sat in the shade of a tulip tree for three hours, with no other companion than the spyglass with which he had been scanning a distant bit of the road, suddenly lowered the instrument.

"They're comin'!" he shouted. "They're just roundin' the Saddleback! In a two-seated carriage! And Fabe Shimp is a drivin' 'em!"

That Poythress should shout was a startling thing

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## THE OTHER BOY

Entry No. 81 in Our Prize Story Competition

BY JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



PERHAPS Walt Monaban would have got on better outside of New York. Certainly his fifteen years in Harlem streets had made nothing out of him that his father could point to with pride. Lombroso would have shrugged cynically at Walt's ears. They looked very like two "egg crackers"—if you know what they are. But old Lom didn't know it all, and we don't believe Walt was all to the bad. We will positively state, nevertheless, that he was not the remotest connection of Little Lord Fauntleroy's. At the tender though tough age of seven he and his twin brother Willie, who was subsequently snuffed out of

Harlem and life such as we know it by a tougher automobile, were captured by the Trenton, New Jersey, police. They were armed to the gums, one might almost say, as they were then at the age when the first set of teeth are giving up their seats to a more mature array.

Their provisions when they were captured had been reduced to three sultana biscuits between them. Their bowie knives taken from them, they were shipped back to their parents sadder and not much wiser tads. Perhaps it would have been better to have allowed them to go out West and slay Comanches—one never knows.

Walt could never be kept at school—the school couldn't stand it. So he had roamed the streets and sporadically accepted employment for a week or so at a time; but the lure of the streets was stronger than the predigested environment advised by his father—by all fathers, in fact, to all sons.

Walt and his pal Bert (pronounced Boit) Steger had been strolling along 125th-st. with two young girls of about their own age. The four were laughing and chatting as gaily and informally as if the acquaintance was of long standing.

Walt threw away the stub of a cigarette. "Come on, Girls, let's go see the movin' pitchers! The old man has one of them joints along here."

The two giggling girls looked at each other in doubt, and the fluffy haired one said:

"We dassent. We gottter be home by half past five."

"Ah, Gee! it ain't five yet. Come on!" laughed Bert,

tugging one of them by the arm. "His father owns the Dime Palace right near the corner. There, see it?"

"Well, all right; but only for a few minutes, Boys," said the Fluffy One.

TRANSFER this scene to Arcady, if your imagination is in good working order, put these youths and maidens in lavender tunics and sage green draperies and sandals, and change 125th-st. to daisy spotted green hills, tinkling brooks, a big eyed deer or two walking daintily by their sides—and give these poor kids a chance for their white alleys.

Lots of things are shocking because they are modern—now—in our midst—under our noses.

The doorkeeper at the Dime Palace passed the noisy four in, saying to Walt, "Ye know, Walt, it's as much as me job's woi't ter let youse in. Yer none of yer sixteen yet—"

"Ah, quit yer kiddin', Abe!" laughed Walt, giving the lanky doorkeeper a playful jab in the ribs as he passed through the swinging door into the darkened hall.

The four youngsters sat there watching the moving pictures with occasional sniggers and jokes. The place was one of those narrow, down sloping halls with embossed tin walls and no ventilation except for the moment as someone pushed aside the curtains at the entrance. The doorkeeper relieved the monotony of keeping the door by once or twice during the afternoon singing in the dark, accompanied by fiendishly colored lantern slides of refined though sentimental ballads like "My Heart's Way Down in Macy's Basement, Dear!" or "Call Me Up When Hubby's On the Road!"

During the progress of a set of pictures portraying a burglary—its inception, plans, and accomplishment—Walt seemed to be watching with more than usual interest. He only said "Geest!" at the conclusion when the burglar got away successfully from the police and, as the final tableau, was shown enlarged gloating over a bag of silverware and jewels with appropriate grimaces. He didn't seem to hear a remark of the Fluffy Girl's until she tweaked his ear.

"What's the matter, Mr. Moving Pitcher Man's Son, dopy?"

Walt grinned. "None—I was just thinkin'."

"Listen to him kiddin' himself, Lulu!" the Fluffy One said by way of sarcasm to her friend.

The two young girls powdered their noses and said they must be going.

"See you again sometime," Bert smiled at them, and he and Walt watched their departure with the air of self satisfied men about town.

THE suggestion of the moving picture bore fruit in Walt's mind.

That evening after supper he feigned a headache, and went to his room early instead of making for the streets, his real home. He stood in his doorway listening, slipped off his shoes, tiptoed to his father's bedroom, and noiselessly got a revolver from the bureau drawer and shoved it into his pocket. He returned to his room and waited at his window for midnight, watching the thousands of theatergoers returning, until the streets at last were more or less quiet. Then, shoes in hand, he slipped out of the front door, closing it gradually until the final inevitable click of the lock.

He listened a moment, then put on his shoes and went down the stairs and out. He must have walked twenty blocks up Lenox-ave. before he finally turned down a side street and walked slowly past the houses on the south side, examining each one as he went by, but keeping a sharp lookout for cops. He had no plan, no particular "crib" that he had planned to "crack," as the burglars of literature put it. We personally disavow any knowledge whatever of the expressions of the real flesh and blood cracksmen used in alluding to his little mergers.

Walt left it entirely to fate which house should have the honor of being the arena of his first effort in high class crime. The feel of the gun under his hand in his pocket gave him an excited sense of invincibility.

He suddenly came to a vacant lot. This seemed propositions.

Looking quickly up—and down the quiet street to make sure he was unnoticed, he nimbly climbed from an area railing to the top of the fence and dropped over into a bunch of weeds and an uncatalogued collection of antique tin cans. Then he made his way to the rear over hummocky ground, sealed another fence into somebody's back yard, then stood quietly up in a corner of the fence and waited to see if anyone was stirring. There were no lights to be seen in the house, and the

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## THE RETURN OF STEPTOE

Continued from page 6

of itself. What he shouted was vastly more startling. A scraping and upsetting of chairs on the veranda was followed by the wild leaping of their late occupants to the ground, only Powhatan and the two Birdsongs bolding their places. The boys playing ball in the road raced up to learn the cause of the excitement. A stream of flushed and floury handed women from the kitchen surged round the corner of the house.

"Ca'm yourselves—ca'm yourselves—everybody!" shouted Powhatan; though his own black eyes were snapping. "You act like a passel o' chickens under the shadder of a henhawk. The Saddleback is a mile away, and they won't reach hyar fer a spell o' time. Poyth, you sure Fabe Shimp air a drivin' of 'em?"

"Looked like him, Pap," answered Poythress, rather abashed by the furor he had kicked up. "They dipped down out o' sight now."

"I'll bet a bar'l of moonshine you're wrong," grumbled his father, "and like enough sp'iled a good dinner besides, tollin' all of them women away from their pots and kettles at the last minute. Perlee—Olivette—all on you! Skeeaddler fer the kitchen and make ready to dish up your truck. Steptoe and his bride air comin', whether Fabe's drivin' 'em or not. And ef he is drivin' 'em, all I got to say is that the day of meracles is by no means past."

FABE was driving them. More than that, his wizened coccanut face was crinkled in a fixed smile, and after carefully making a landing at the horse block outside the fence he leaped down from the surrey with a flourish of his whip.

"Hyer we air, Neighbors! A little surprised to see me, I swow, ban't you? It's me, though, by juice! all right. Step and me air friends ag'in. He's squared up with me, the law case ag'in' him is dismissed, and I've brung him and his ledly a good thutty mile, safe and sound."

The gathered company stood motionless. A young man dressed in a modest blue suit and straw hat emerged from behind the curtain that screened the rear seat. No one stirred; for no one recognized him. A startling change had indeed been wrought in Steptoe. He was neither the mountain dave-devil of former days, nor the gawky youth of the photographs. The day of horse blanket plaids had passed with him forever. Manhood had straightened and refined his lips.

Yet in a sense he was still a boy, and his faultless teeth shone in a grin as he surveyed his gathered kin. He saw his old mother's lips twitch as she mechanically wiped her hands on the kitchen apron she had forgotten to lay off. But she did not come forward yet; for a man shall leave his mother and cleave to his wife, and the wife had not yet appeared. Granny wanted to see her before making a move.

The young woman lost no time, and after stepping down stood still a moment, as if abashed. Her clothes were quite as modest as her husband's. Only one garment, a heavy veil, struck a discordant note in the onlookers, and this she immediately began to unpin.

At about the same instant Squirrel Dead-moat, who was leaning against the fence, emitted a startled "Good Lord A'mighty!" Steptoe laughed, and the bride, still fumbling at the stubborn pin, parted her red lips in a smile. Then down came the veil, revealing to the gaping throng the pretty, flushed face of Spicy Birdsong; more exactly, Spicy Birdsong Pentecost!

COME, Friends, and meet my wife!" called out Steptoe gaily, as he ushered Spicy through the gate.

Granny Pentecost, dazed, doubting her senses, moved slowly forward. Then, with a whimper of joy, she fastened her new daughter in a rigid, prolonged embrace. Next she kissed her son, so much broader in shoulder and loin than when last she saw him, and gazed searchingly into his blue eyes as if to see whether any unclean thing in the Babylon below had spotted his soul.

"Steppy," she murmured, "I don't believe you'd tell a lie now fer two dollars, like you did when you flagged that train."

He flushed and laughed. "I don't believe I would, either, Mammy."

All tension was now released, and the women, laughing, crying, screaming, kissing, pounced upon the young couple. Of the men, Powhatan, with proudly shining eyes, was the first to greet his children. The other men lingered in the background until after the women were out of the way, most of them frankly pleased over the turn of affairs;

but some of them decidedly chagrined, for Steptoe was, as usual, on top. He had taken the wind out of his censors' sails; and as he passed among them, with a subtle gleam of triumph in his eyes, no one attempted to "damp" him. In fact, the dampening was all on the other side, and Owain, he who had referred to Steptoe as a "tow headed cub," was all but deferential as he accepted his brother's hand.

Dinner was served on a long improvised table under the lofty green canopy of a group of ehinkapin oaks. For upward of an hour the necessities of the inner man received almost exclusive attention. But at last there came a lull, and someone asked Fabian Shimp where he had picked up his new horse. Fabe, who was stripping a roasting ear with machine-like speed and precision, arched his eyebrows in lieu of a smile and nodded at Steptoe, who answered:

"I shipped him to Fabe to replace the one I shot."

"Why, that huss is with a stableful of plugs like the one you shot," observed Rhys Pentecost.

"Yes, he's a Kentucky bluegrass," said Steptoe. "Fabe is to give me fifty dollars to boot."

This "to boot" had a familiar ring to those who had ever swapped horses with Steptoe. It was also characteristic of the young man that he should turn a penny even in an act of reparation. Ato smiled.

Step saw the smile and added quickly, "That horse cost me a hundred dollars. Two hours later I refused a hundred and fifty."

Fabe snickered gleefully. "I'll bet it's the God's truth! Feller down at Holly Tree offered me a hunderd and thutty fer that hoss the day I unloaded him."

POWHATAN leaned back in his rustic chair and drew out a silver watch a few sizes smaller than an alarm clock. Then, fumbling for his pipe, he said in a loud voice, "Steppy, ef you have no objections, it strikes me this would be a ripe time fer you to 'splain some things. Some on us air a mite cur'us to know how you and Spicy come to yoke together after bustin' apart wunst. I don't include the women among the cur'us, of co'se, ner Emmett or Calloope. By the way, Calloope," he added facetiously, "what was you goin' to make in that apple butter little of mother's?"

"Just wanted to b'ile down some of the stories about these two young people," reported Calloope instantly, eliciting a roar of laughter.

"That sort of answers your question to me, Pap," said Steptoe. Postprandial oratory was unknown on Big Rainy; but he had already been a "tonguey" lad, and he now half unconsciously rose to his feet. "Spicy and I never really broke off—which will be news to some. Right after I ran away she wrote me that she stood ready to marry me any time that I'd square myself with Fabe Shimp and the law. At first I wouldn't. I even wrote her I had another girl. I reckon her picture's somewhere inside now, ef you all can't use it to keep skunks out of the hen-house." He smiled at his wife's rosy face.

But after Spicy came down to the academy at Marysville, I drove over to see her one Sunday. I found out I'd forgotten just how pretty she really was—though I never married her fer looks, by no means. Then I was promoted from Sims to Macedonia, which is only five miles from Marysville. After that I seen Spicy every Sunday; and, to make a long story short, I come round to her way of thinkin' about squarin' up with Fabe and the law, and we agreed to get married as soon as her school was out. And here we are!"

He paused and swept the company with serious eyes. "More than that, we're here to stay, ef I can make arrangements. If Pappy still wants to turn over the Injun Head farm to me, I'll take it and work it. Not as a gift, however; but to be paid fer as I can."

An electrified silence followed this announcement, as unexpected as the sight of a full quilled fledgling returning to its nest. Granny's throat worked spasmodically, and though she had enacted tragedy with bonedry eyes, she now bowed her head to hide her tears. Powhatan, however, was the target for everybody's gaze. He took his time, and thoughtfully surveyed the dazzling "Bald" of the mountain, a landmark of lifelong association.

"My son, I can't give you Injun Head," he answered benignly; "fer since you went away I promised it to Poythress's boy Wilder, when he comes twenty-one, which be next month. But ef you and Spicy air willin' to put up with your old mother and me,

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you're welcome to the home place here. The house seems bigger than it used to, and before all you children up and married; and since Dooey left, last fall, it's sort of lonesome, specially evenin's, when the whippoorwills are hollerin'. But, Steppy," he added gravely, "I should want you to make shore that you really keer to farm. I shouldn't expect you to be contented hyer in the mountain long if you've come back just because Spicy wants you to."

"I never asked him to come back," spoke up Spicy. "It was his own offer."

STEPTOE glanced at his elder brothers, — Axom, Ato, Owain, Rhys, Llewelyn, and Cowdry. Their faces were inscrutable; but his instinct and knowledge of their character told him they disapproved of this killing of the fatted calf for him. For the "home place" was the choicest farm on Big Rainy.

"It was my offer. I shall be content, Pap. I came back to farm because I want to farm, not because I played out below. I resigned a sixty-dollar job last week."

"You don't expect to make sixty dollars a month furrin' it, do you?" interrupted Rhys in amazement.

"I do—and more. Listen! When I left hyer I pitied a man that had to foller a plow; but some things have happened since. Last Thanksgiving time I loaded ten turkeys for a furrer. Those birds bring him a dollar and a half apiece. A little later he shipped a carload of hogs. What do you think they bring him? Twelve hundred dollars! I know; for the money passed through my hands. Last spring he shipped a crate o' chickens, just a small crate, and he got eleven dollars and seventy cents back."

"You forgot that down below and up hyer air two different places," objected Axom. "Why, last fall I sold Widow Barnes a ten-pound turkey for fifty cents. And I sold a two-hundred-pound hawk to old Whitson at the Notch for six dollars, and glad to get it."

"Why?" queried Stepto eagerly. "Because you 'uns haven't a market. But you'll have one soon. A big smelter is goin' to be built at Tomahawk, and the T. & O. is goin' to tap it by a branch road up through our valley. I've seen the survey. There'll be a station at Wagon Wheel, just six miles from this very house; and next year the price of chickens and turkeys and calves and hogs at Wagon Wheel will be the same as in Cincinnati and Richmond, less commissions and haulage. No more fifty-cent turkeys on Big Rainy then!"

This was a clincher; but finally Poythress ferreted out an objection. "But we don't raise no poultry and hawks up hyar, more'n what we want to eat ourselves."

"And if I should want to buy a turkey, though 'tain't likely, danged if I want to pay a dollar and a half for him!" objected Owain. "And it would take a right smart of cawn to fat up a keerload of hawks, if I'm a judge," added Squirrel.

"You fellers talk like babies!" exclaimed Stepto. "I intend to raise more poultry and hogs than I want to eat. I intend to sell turkeys, not buy 'em. And I'll be glad to turn thirty- or forty-cent cawn into eight- or nine-cent pork. So'll you fellers, after watchin' my smoke a spell!" he added, with his shrewd smile, and sat down.

AFTER a cold supper, an hour before early candlelighting, horses and mules were hooked up, goodbys said, and the company dispersed—north, east, south, and west. As Axom drove homeward, along the winding, flower fringed mountain road, the level rays of the sun burnished the boles of the forest with copper. Three girls in their teens, seated on a board across the wagon box, relived the great day in their chatter. Several younger children slept in the straw. The parents in front were silent and meditative.

The Axom Pentecosts were prosperous folk, as Big Rainy rates prosperity; but they worked hard and played little, and often yearned to relax their rigid grip a little. "Well, what you think of Step now?" asked Axom finally.

"I think his little finger is bigger than the hoins of some of his brothers," answered Olivette decisively.

"You think there's anything in what he told us?"

"If there ain't, it'll be the first time he ever barked up the wrong tree, for as makin' money goes. If that railroad comes through, I shouldn't be surprised if we could manage to send Cornelia to the 'cademy next year or the year after."

"It's funny; but I was sort o' figgerin' on that same thing myself," answered the husband, in a cheerfuller tone than his wife had heard him use in many a day.

## THE MAGIC OF MAGNETS

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

THOSE who have watched a toy magnet lift up pins and needles, and marveled not a little at the unseen power that causes the bits of metal to jump, might well be excused for standing agliss at the sight of a modern giant magnet picking up several tons of iron and steel from the scrapheap and conveying it with ease and rapidity to the melting furnace beyond.

So great has been the commercial development of the magnet that it can lift five and a half tons. These giant magnets used in iron and steel mills can pick up hot as well as cold billets, and a single one of this character will displace half a hundred workmen.

A further improvement may be noted in the combination of skull cracker and magnet. The skull cracker is a huge pear shaped ball of iron suspended by a chain to a hook and steel ropes. This skull cracker is dropped with great force on scrap metal to be broken up for remelting. It breaks the metal into convenient small pieces, and is lifted up and down by the magnet until the scrap is reduced to proper size. Then the invisible fingers of the magnet gather up the small pieces and carry them to the melting furnace. The entire operation is accomplished in one hundredth of the time formerly required by manual labor.

More recently magnets have been employed in the milling industry to pick out small particles of metal that frequently get into flour and cause explosions through friction when they come in contact with the big rollers. Not a particle of metal can escape the powerful magnets suspended over the chute through which the grain passes. In mining and metallurgical work the magnet has become an indispensable labor saving agent. The magnetic separation of ores has saved thousands of dollars to mining companies. When the rocks are crushed and pulverized, powerful magnets gather up the infinitesimal parts of metal released from their beds and convey them to the smelting furnace. Quantities of ore can thus be saved from old tailings that were formerly considered pure waste. Recently commercial magnets were employed for the novel purpose of raising sunken treasures. A big cargo of nails was lost in twenty fathoms of water, and the

loss seemed irreparable until some enterprising genius raised them easily and cheaply by means of a magnet suspended from a derrick by steel cables.

In the most improved commercial magnets hollow steel castings are used, in which magnetized coils are placed. The latter are built up of alternate layers of copper and asbestos, and insulated from the cast steel frames by thick sheets of mica. A magnet of this construction is proof against heat and cold, and free from the danger of short circuiting. There is nothing combustible used in its manufacture, and it can gather up a ton of hot scraps of steel with comparative ease.

But the invisible fingers of the magnet can pick up the most delicate splinter of steel no larger than a sewing needle as easily as it lifts a huge iron or steel beam weighing a ton or two. The small magnets have therefore found as great a field of usefulness as the big ones. In all trades they are employed for handling pieces of metal too small for fingers to pick up easily. In a medical way they are used successfully for extracting iron or steel cinders from the eye, and also for drawing out of the body needles and pieces of metal that have found lodgement there. A dressmaker who had inadvertently swallowed a dozen needles was operated upon in this way with entire success. For several days she was placed under a powerful magnet, until every needle had been drawn from the body.

In a therapeutic way magnets have proved of value in destroying ulcerous and cancerous growths, and even blood diseases of some kinds have yielded to their curative effects. A man with the point of a dagger broken off in his body had it removed by a magnet. Another patient had been suffering from a painful ulcer on the chin for many years without finding relief. He was finally cured by treatment with a magnet, which drew from his chin a lot of steel filings that had caused all the trouble. The filings had found lodgment in a cut in his face one day when working before a turning lathe. No immediate trouble had followed, and the man had forgotten the incident until the magnet drew them out and gave the ulcer a chance to heal.

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